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Schelling
Zwischen Fichte und Hegel
Between Fichte and Hegel

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A Sketch of Schelling's Appropriation of the Kantian
Imagination in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*:
Schelling's Divergence from Fichte

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It is no secret that F. W. J. Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* is heavily influenced by Fichte's work in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Schelling himself acknowledged the »non-originality of his 1800 system and its dependence on »Fichtean Idealism.«¹ However, as Michael Vater points out, Schelling's *System* serves as the stepping off point for Schelling's break with Fichte and establishes the beginning of his own dialectical method.²

To understand Schelling's *System* as the break with Fichte's philosophy and as the beginning of Schelling's emphasis on the will and freedom is, of course, a worthwhile endeavor that exposes the continuity of Schelling's thought. However, this way of understanding Schelling's *System* overlooks an important insight that needs to be drawn out. This insight has to do with the role of the imagination, as expressed by Schelling in Part Six of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, when he says that »[W]hat we speak of as the poetic gift is merely productive intuition, reiterated to its highest power. It is one and the same capacity that is active in both, the only one whereby we are able to think and to couple together even what is contradictory – and its name is imagination.«³

In the Introduction to the translation of Schelling's *System*, Michael Vater claims that the section on the philosophy of art is the »first announcement of Schelling's own system of absolute philosophy, the System of Identity,« and is »extra-systematic.«⁴ However, Schelling recognizes that it is the imagination that has been

¹ F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendentalism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia press, 1978), xii. Hereafter referred to as *System*.

² *System*, xii-xiii.

³ *System*, 230.

⁴ *System*, xv.

at work throughout the *System* from its beginning in productive intuition to its apex in the philosophy of art. Hence, this section is not extra-systematic, and what Schelling exposes is that the imagination makes the system possible.

Fichte also prioritized the imagination in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, since he recognized the importance of the Kantian imagination on the theoretical level. However, as Hegel points out, imagination is the weak point of Fichte's system, since the imagination remains on the theoretical level. In contradistinction to Fichte, Schelling recognizes that the imagination and its power of synthesis is the power that brings the opposites together and hence is the strong point of Schelling's *System*. Thus, Schelling sees beyond Fichte and sees the Kantian imagination, that »blind but indispensable function of the soul,« as the key to the *System*.⁵

In this paper, I focus on the role of imagination in Schelling's *System* and show that his version of the system of transcendental idealism is already beyond Fichte's. To accomplish this task, I discuss Kant's sense of the imagination, explain Fichte's view of the imagination and its limitation in his system, examine the role of synthesis in Schelling's *System*, expose the key places in the *System* where imagination must arise, and end with a suggestion regarding a possible way to interpret Schelling's later philosophy in terms of the insights into the imagination that arise in this early work.

It has been well argued that the imagination is the primary capacity in the Kantian philosophy.⁶ The imagination makes its appearance in key ways throughout the entire critical project. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, knowledge, the connection of the categories with the intuitions, would not be possible without the productive imagination, and the dialectical flight of fancy would not exist without the reproductive imagination. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the insights gleaned from the imagination in Kant's theoretical philosophy underlie the concept of the *typic* (an analogue of a schema), which conditions the rational moral law's ability to affect our natural being. In the *Critique of Judgment*, the symbolic hypotyposis would not exist without the aesthetic imagination, and thus the chasm between nature and freedom would not be bridged. In a general sense, the ways that the imagination arises in key areas in the Kantian critical philosophy reveal that systematization,

⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A78/B103.

⁶ The following thinkers are among those who have exposed the primacy of the Kantian imagination in their works: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Rudolph Makkreel, John Sallis, Bernard Freyberg, and Richard Findler.

while it requires reason to supply the unconditioned principle, cannot take place without the imagination.⁷

What led Kant to this insight was that the imagination possessed the capacity to generate synthesis and thereby to bring together either opposing capacities of the mind or opposing regions wherein the capacities function. The imagination makes it possible for the oppositions to have contact with each other and intermingle. However, for Kant the opposites can never become other than what they are.

Nonetheless, Kant always suggests that there ought to be an ascension from what is lower to what is higher. For example, sense data must be governed by the understanding, if we are to have knowledge; reason must supply the principles for the understanding, if knowledge is to achieve some sense of systematization; and in the practical realm, rational moral principles ought to have an impact on the natural world, if we are to fulfill our true vocation as moral beings. But how is this ascension possible? How does one ascend from sense to understanding to reason? How does one ascend from nature to freedom? How does one ascend from the conditioned to the unconditioned? What makes this movement possible? Kant plots the path for the ascension but does not account for its movement, and in this sense Kant's philosophy is static. Yet Kant sees that what happens on the lower levels repeats itself on the higher levels and that the higher levels ought to influence the lower levels.

The German Idealists are the ones who embark on system building and try to account for the movement of the ascension from the conditioned to the unconditioned. Taking their clue from Kant, Fichte and Schelling move the imagination into the foreground. While Fichte has to admit that the imagination is crucial in his attempt to form the science of knowledge, it is Schelling who exposes the hidden possibilities within Kant's insights into the imagination and attempts to overcome the static nature of the Kantian critical philosophy in his system of transcendental idealism. What we have in Schelling is a venture into the dialectic in the late 1790's.⁸

As early as 1801, Hegel had noted the difference between Fichte's and Schelling's philosophical systems. Even though Hegel saw that Fichte's philosophy was »an authentic product of speculation,« since it made, as Schelling had done, intellectual intuition »the absolute principle of philosophy,« Fichte's system remained incom-

⁷ Kant makes this claim in the First Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*.

⁸ Schelling even understands the process of thought in terms of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, the »standard« formulation of dialectical thought, (*System*, 47).

plete.⁹ The ego remained for Fichte a subjective Subject-Object. In other words, the ego was unable to come back to nature from freedom and become an objective Subject-Object. Fichte did not complete the system and produce a complete synthetic identity. As Hegel showed, nonconscious production on a theoretical level was unable to complete the move to freedom and see production as an act of freedom. Hence, all Fichte could do is have the ego postulate itself on the practical level and maintain itself on the level of the »ought.« Fichte remained on the level of thought and did not return to intuition. Hence, Fichte retained the oppositions that the system must overcome in order to be a system, and difference did not reach a point of indifference.

The problem in Fichte, as expressed by Hegel and as noted by Schelling, is that Fichte is unable to generate the necessary synthesis that will bridge the gap between nature and freedom. The reason the necessary synthesis is lacking is due to Fichte's understanding of the imagination in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In his discussion of the imagination, Fichte sees that the imagination makes possible the synthesis of the opposites that occur within theoretical knowledge. However, Fichte claims that all the imagination can do is »waver between object and non-object.«¹⁰ The imagination's wavering brings theoretical reason to the threshold of the practical but does not make it possible to cross over the threshold. All Fichte can do to cross over into the realm of the practical is resort to faith.¹¹

According to Hegel, the weakness of Fichte's philosophy is due to the role of faith in the turn to the practical. Since Fichte maintains the explicit Kantian limits of the productive imagination in its determinant role in knowledge, Fichte cannot show how the identity of the subject and object is achieved and fails to grasp the identity of the subject and object. Fichte can only express the identity in terms of an ought, not an is, and he fails to grasp the synthesis necessary for the system to achieve completion.

While Fichte could not move to the point of indifference, Hegel sees in Schelling's system the move to the absolute and thereby to the point of indifference. In other words, Schelling had in his own system of transcendental idealism and philosophy of nature moved beyond Fichte's system. However, Hegel's presentation of Schelling's system reveals a disagreement with Schelling's deduction of the

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1977), 173. Hereafter referred to as *Difference*.

¹⁰ J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (NY: Meredith Corp, 1970), 215.

¹¹ *Science of Knowledge*, see pages 185 - 217 for Fichte's discussion of the imagination.

absolute in terms of the priority of art in Schelling's system. Already in the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel places revealed religion above art, which is not a move that Schelling makes in his own system. Instead, Schelling places religion below art and gives a preeminent role to the imagination in his system – a role that Hegel was dissatisfied with in his own views.

While I am not concerned with Hegel's differences from Schelling in this essay, I am concerned with Schelling's divergences from the Fichtean imagination and the way that imagination makes its appearance in Schelling's system of transcendental idealism. The question is: why does Schelling give priority to the imagination? The answer is simple. The productive imagination makes the movement of the system possible and overcomes the oppositions encountered within the system. The issue is: how does the imagination accomplish this movement and reconcile opposites in Schelling's system of transcendental idealism?

Schelling sees the way that the imagination occurs at all levels of synthesis in the ascension to the absolute; hence his system supersedes Fichte's system. Hegel saw that Schelling had already advanced beyond Fichte. Schelling's philosophy of nature exposed an »objective Subject-Object beside the subjective Subject-Object,« and showed how both were »united in something higher than the subject.«¹² However, Hegel does not focus on the imagination in Schelling's system, and hence Hegel does not show how Schelling accomplishes the movement that Fichte missed. Hegel critiques Fichte's view of the imagination, but he is strangely silent on Schelling's use of the imagination in the *System*.¹³ The movement for Schelling is accomplished by the imagination. The issue is: how does Schelling's insight into the imagination emerge in his system of transcendental idealism?

Schelling exposes his divergence from Fichte in his *System* already in the Foreword, but only implicitly so by making the remark that the system as a »whole is concluded« in the philosophy of art.¹⁴ After all, the goal of his system is »to enlarge transcendentalism into what it really should be, namely a system of all knowledge.«¹⁵ The way to accomplish this is to move from what is partial to what is complete. Schelling notices here that the achievement of absolute identity is to move beyond the practical, since it stands in opposition to the theoretical, and to bring the two

¹² *Difference*, 82.

¹³ Even Werner Marx, who recognizes to some extent the importance of the imagination in Schelling's *System*, does not discuss Hegel's silence on this issue. Werner Marx, *The Philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling: History, System and Freedom*, trans. Thomas Nenon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984). See pages 33-57.

¹⁴ *System*, 4.

¹⁵ *System*, 1.

into a higher synthesis. Hence, Schelling diverges from Fichte at the outset by claiming to provide an absolute synthetic identity.¹⁶

While the Foreword announces Schelling's step beyond Fichte, it is in section 3 of the *System*, entitled »Preliminary Division of Transcendental Philosophy,« that Schelling begins to develop his differences by revealing the system's need for synthesis. As Schelling shows, the task of transcendental philosophy is to show how knowledge as such is possible, which it shows by finding the first principle of all knowledge, the point that establishes »absolute certainty,« and then allowing this principle to unfold into its completeness.¹⁷ Thus Schelling must first deduce the principle, second, show how representations coincide with external objects (the task of theoretical philosophy), and, third, show how representations affect external objects (the task of practical philosophy.) Unlike Fichte, the showing that occurs on the level of practical philosophy must be undertaken and not allowed to remain on the level of the ought.

However, as long as an opposition is present between theory and praxis, the task of achieving absolute identity is incomplete. A synthesis of the two needs to take place, a synthesis that results in a »higher discipline.«¹⁸ Fichte hinted at this move, but he never accomplished it. For Schelling, the higher discipline needs to reconcile the theoretical and the practical. However, the reconciliation can only occur if a »predetermined harmony« is already present, which means that a synthetic identity of the oppositions is already there.¹⁹ In other words, the whole is already present. This synthetic identity must be a synthesis of what is both conscious and nonconscious – conscious in the sense that the practical side, through willing, actively affects external objects, and unconscious in the sense that the theoretical side, through nature's mechanism, influences the ideal realm.

The first explicit appearance of the synthetic identity of the conscious and nonconscious arises in Schelling's teleology, which exposes nature as »purposive without being purposively explicable.«²⁰ However, teleology falls short of completeness, and what we have to do in the system is show how to come back to the first

¹⁶ One can argue, as Hegel does, that Fichte has the same spirit as Schelling. However, as Hegel points out in the *Differenzschrift*, when Fichte writes on morality, law and aesthetics, he never shows the synthesis needed to reach the point of indifference. Hegel even says that it is remarkable that Fichte can express himself so well about beauty, when what he says is inconsistent with regard to his system, (*Difference*, 151-152).

¹⁷ *System*, 10.

¹⁸ *System*, 11.

¹⁹ *System*, 11.

²⁰ *System*, 12.

principle and expose its own identity in its completeness. This process requires exhibiting the »conscious and nonconscious activity« in »consciousness itself,« and Schelling calls this an »aesthetic activity.«²¹ What is real, the objective world, is only the result of »the unconscious, poetry of the spirit,« and the aesthetic world is the result of »the conscious poetry of the spirit.«²² Both are aesthetic activities, one conscious, the other nonconscious.

However, if synthetic identity is already there and is only drawn out through the movement of the system, then what is present at the end is there at the beginning. Further, if synthesis is a result of the power of the imagination and if aesthetic activity is the result of the imagination, then the system begins and ends with the imagination. How does this happen?

If identity is to remain throughout the system, then the identity must be a result of synthesis, and for this to be possible, the imagination must be at work throughout the system in order to maintain the identity.²³ In the beginning of the *System*, the sense of the imagination's power of synthesis arises through the realization that »all philosophy is productive.«²⁴ The »organ« of philosophy is »inner sense,« not outer sense.²⁵ In other words, all philosophical production is internal. In inner sense, there is a »constant producing of these original acts of the intellect,« and a »reflection upon the production.«²⁶ So what occurs simultaneously is that the self is both »the intuited (the producer) and the intuitant.«²⁷

As Schelling points out, this simultaneous act can only take place »through an aesthetic act of the imagination.«²⁸ Schelling cannot show this imaginative component fully at the beginning of the system, but it is already in mind. Further, to place this insight at the beginning of the system is to reveal that the role of the aesthetic sense and the imagination is not extrasystematic. Art is externalized production and philosophy is internalized production, but both require an »aesthetic sense« to be productive.²⁹

²¹ *System*, 12.

²² *System*, 12.

²³ Hegel sees in the *Differenzschrift* that identity must be there throughout the system, but he does not focus on the imagination. *Difference*, 155.

²⁴ *System*, 13.

²⁵ *System*, 13.

²⁶ *System*, 13.

²⁷ *System*, 13.

²⁸ *System*, 13.

²⁹ *System*, 14.

Noting that a system of knowledge must begin with a principle, and only one basic principle, such a principle must be both a starting point and an ending point. What is there in the beginning of the system must be there at the end, only as fully realized.

The concern of knowledge in transcendental idealism is that of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is a »conflict of absolutely opposed activities.«³⁰ The two opposing activities are: »the real, objective, limitable activity« that »reaches out into infinity« and »the ideal, subjective, illimitable activity« that »intuits oneself in that infinity.«³¹ Schelling understands self-consciousness as the absolute principle of all knowledge.³² Such a principle must »be one in which content is conditioned by form, and form in turn by content.«³³ Further, in the principle it is not a matter of form presupposing content, or vice versa. Instead, form and content must affect each other in a reciprocal manner. The system is not one of presupposition but one of »reciprocity.«³⁴ What is in the system is already there in the principle and merely needs to be unfolded out of itself. Within the system, we are already within a circle of knowledge.³⁵

Following out the Kantian insight into knowledge, Schelling recognizes that true knowledge must be synthetic. Hence, the basic principle must be synthetic too, since one cannot derive knowledge from mere analytic propositions. But since the principle must be basic and one in which form and content condition each other in an unconditional manner, the synthesis must also be involved in an identity. In other words, the principle must be a synthetic identity. The problem is that synthetic propositions are not usually propositions of identity. So how can this presentation be both identical and synthetic?

This synthetic identity occurs only in self-consciousness, where what is »presented is at the same time that which presents.«³⁶ In self-consciousness, the »intuited

³⁰ *System*, 49.

³¹ *System*, 49.

³² *System*, 18.

³³ *System*, 20.

³⁴ *System*, 20.

³⁵ Even if we must begin from a principle, Schelling's system seems to be nonfoundational. Tom Rockmore understands Fichte's system as nonfoundational, in the sense that Fichte's approach is circular, and »circularity is incompatible with foundationalism.« I believe the same claim can be made for Schelling's *System*. See Tom Rockmore, »Fichte's Foundationalism,« *New Perspectives on Fichte*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 97.

³⁶ *System*, 24.

is also the intuitant.«³⁷ The principle of identity presupposes self-consciousness, as all logical operations must do. I cannot think the proposition »A = A« unless I can see that A can become an object for its subject. Such an act involves a prior awareness of self-consciousness. Hence, knowledge is prior to logic and its formalization.

Self-consciousness is »an act of absolute freedom.«³⁸ There is nothing prior to this act of identity and discrimination. Here Schelling goes beyond Kant. The »I think« that accompanies all of my representations and provides unity to my representations is not basic, since it remains empty in Kant. What is more basic is the »I am,« which self-consciousness, when it is free from all of its representations, becomes aware of in its existence. The »I think« is part of a determinant judgment of objective representations, while the »I am« is a »infinite proposition,« one not limited by anything other than the self.³⁹ Hence, the self is not an external object but is »non-objective,« and only becomes an object for itself by »making itself into an object for itself.«⁴⁰ This sense of the object is only produced through reflection. This type of knowing is »absolutely free« and is »essentially an intuition« or a nondiscursive mode of knowledge.⁴¹ As Schelling says, »an intuition freely productive in itself, and in which producer and product are one and the same« is called intellectual intuition.⁴² This non-sensuous intuition revealed in self-consciousness is the »organ of all transcendental thinking.«⁴³ Since intellectual intuition is nondiscursive, Schelling says that it »cannot be demonstrated but only demanded,« or »postulated.«⁴⁴

We have to keep in mind that intellectual intuition is synthetic and can be formulated in a »basic proposition of philosophy.«⁴⁵ This proposition is the »self = self,« an equation of opposites that is both identical and synthetic.

However, we need to keep in mind that there is no synthesis without imagination. Imagination makes self-affection possible. Schelling knows this well. Even the issue of postulation is one of mediation. The postulate is neither theoretical nor practical, neither a »theorem« nor a »command« but is between the two.⁴⁶ Further, this mediation forms the basis of the theoretical and the practical and can bring

³⁷ *System*, 24.

³⁸ *System*, 24.

³⁹ *System*, 26.

⁴⁰ *System*, 26.

⁴¹ *System*, 27.

⁴² *System*, 27.

⁴³ *System*, 27.

⁴⁴ *System*, 28.

⁴⁵ *System*, 29.

⁴⁶ *System*, 33.

them together through its free act of postulation. This postulate serves as the bridge between theory and praxis. What this postulate should do in Fichte's philosophy it actually does in Schelling's philosophy.⁴⁷ In a very real sense, the subject matter of philosophy is the imagination.

However, not only is the subject matter of philosophy rooted in the imagination. Schelling's understanding of philosophical activity is intimately connected to the imagination. Given the original necessity of synthesis and its eternal character, Schelling wonders how philosophy is possible. It is only possible as an »imitation« of the original.⁴⁸ »Imitation is the »act with which all philosophy begins,« and philosophy is imitative in that it interrupts the absolute synthesis that is always already there.⁴⁹ Philosophy is an »absolute interruption,« and the act of interruption is an act of freedom.⁵⁰ However, for philosophy to take place, the free interruptive act must be undertaken. Hence, both freedom and necessity come together. Philosophy, as imitation, is a free act of what takes place necessarily and reveals the evolution of self-consciousness. As an imitative act, philosophy takes place in time and manifests itself as the »history of self-consciousness.«⁵¹ This history occurs in terms of epochs, and philosophy synthetically connects the epochs in an orderly succession on the level of theoretical philosophy. Nonetheless, no imagination, no philosophy.

Having discussed the way the imagination functions in the *System* in general, I must now show specifically where the imagination occurs as synthetic mediation within the *System*. For the sake of brevity, this issue can only be cursorily considered. So I will focus on those areas where imagination generates movement and mediates fundamental areas of opposition within the *System*.

Since Schelling understands productive intuition as an undeveloped mode of the imagination, productive intuition must be the first place to locate the process of synthetic mediation. Theoretical philosophy begins on the level of sensation, and sensation is the sensing of what is opposed to the self. However, if sensing merely remains focused on the sensed, or intuited, then the ability to grasp the self as sensing is lacking, and the awareness of the sensed would have to remain on a non-

⁴⁷ The postulate of the middle is the imagination's role in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

⁴⁸ *System*, 48.

⁴⁹ *System*, 48. This view of philosophy also appears in Schelling's later thought concerning freedom. Schelling speaks of the philosophic act as *Einbilden* to distinguish it from the divine act, which is creative. See Bernard Freytag, *The Meeting of Modern and Greek Thought in Schelling's Freedom Essay* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1978), 78.

⁵⁰ *System*, 48.

⁵¹ *System*, 50.

conscious level. In other words, for the self to be able to sense, it must have a sense of itself sensing. This ability requires an active component of the self as sensing along with the passivity of taking in what is sensed, i. e., the self allows for the passivity.⁵²

An act of sensing that allows itself to sense involves a mode of producing, wherein »activity and passivity mutually presuppose one another within the act.«⁵³ Since the activity and passivity mutually exclude each other, there must be a »middle term« that allows the two to intermingle, and this middle term arises in what Schelling calls productive intuition, which is »an intuiting of intuition.«⁵⁴ Without this higher synthesis, the *System* fails to progress toward intelligence. Thus a synthetic productive intuition occurs at the beginning of the system, which Schelling recognizes as a result of the imagination.

Productive intuition lies only at the beginning of theoretical philosophy and initiates the movement of the *System*, and other synthetic acts are needed on the level of theoretical philosophy to move knowledge toward the condition of indifference. These other areas of imaginative synthesis on the theoretical level include Schelling's discussions of inner sense and schematism. However, I am only focusing on the primary areas where imagination generates movement and mediation. The next key area where imagination arises occurs in the transition to practical philosophy in terms of willing.

The problem that Schelling notices on the level of the theoretical is that there is a certain blindness within nature that blocks our intelligence from seeing itself fully as intuiting and producing in nature. The will is the place in the *System* where »intelligence becomes an object for itself,« since the will comes to realize that the self is productive.⁵⁵ So what we have in the will is »conscious production« as opposed to unconscious production.⁵⁶

At the outset of practical philosophy, willing must still direct itself upon external objects, which the self sees as its own object now, since the self is involved in a transition from nature to freedom. According to Schelling, this transition from theory to praxis could not occur without the imagination.

When Schelling enacts the transition, he takes over Fichte's insight regarding the imagination and refers to the imagination as a »wavering« that takes place »between

⁵² Schelling's insight into productive intuition is reminiscent of Hegel's description of sense certainty as well Hegel's view of natural consciousness. However, the imagination is lacking in Hegel's account.

⁵³ *System*, 65.

⁵⁴ *System*, 72.

⁵⁵ *System*, 156.

⁵⁶ *System*, 156.

finitude and infinity.⁵⁷ This act of wavering serves as the bridge from the theoretical to the practical.

However, as I understand Schelling on this point, he differentiates himself from Fichte by showing that the imaginative wavering is productive. As Schelling says, something is produced in the wavering, and what are produced are Ideas of reason that »oscillate« between finitude and infinity.⁵⁸ In other words, imagination creates a rift that exposes the self's need to move beyond nature. The production of these Ideas exposes theoretical reason as »the imagination in the service of freedom.«⁵⁹ As such, these Ideas are related to what Kant called »antinomies,« since they set up oppositions that expose the inadequacy of theoretical reason and grant access to practical reason.⁶⁰

What is needed to attain freedom is something that functions as an intermediary. This intermediary, or mode of mediation, makes the transition possible, and acts, according to Schelling, in the same way as »symbol« does for ideas or as »schema« does for concepts.⁶¹ In other words, the intermediary functions synthetically and is a result of the imagination, as schema and symbol are. Schelling calls the intermediary that lies between nature and freedom the »ideal.«⁶²

This mode of mediation compels the self to move into the practical realm. This mode of compulsion is a drive, an activity that is both free and spontaneous and that strives to »transform the object into what it ought to be.«⁶³ As such, the drive is causal and »emerges directly from the contradiction« in the attempt to overcome it in a higher synthesis.⁶⁴ In the way Schelling is developing his thought, this drive can only be the result of the imagination, and without the imagination making this mediation possible, the move to the practical would not take place. Fichte may suggest this sense of mediation in his system, but, unlike Schelling, he never shows how the mediation is enacted.

Considering that Schelling has shown that the movement begins with the imagination, understood as productive intuition, and has exposed the imagination as mediating nature and freedom, the final step of the *System* would have to expose the synthetic identity of the theoretical and the practical, and thereby attain

⁵⁷ *System*, 176.

⁵⁸ *System*, 176.

⁵⁹ *System*, 176.

⁶⁰ *System*, 176.

⁶¹ *System*, 171.

⁶² *System*, 176.

⁶³ *System*, 177.

⁶⁴ *System*, 177.

indifference. The move to the point of indifference begins in Schelling's analysis of history. The goal of willing is to expose a moral world order where freedom and necessity come together, and history is the »exhibition of the union of freedom and necessity,« or its synthesis.⁶⁵ What I find interesting about Schelling's sense of history is that it cannot end in time, or end historically, since an absolute synthesis would dissolve the interplay of the conscious and the nonconscious.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, to expose history as the interplay of freedom and necessity is to expose a sense of purposiveness within history.

The exposure of purposiveness means that we must move to teleology, which Schelling had recognized in the Introduction as the first explicit appearance of the synthetic identity. But for nature to be purposive, it must be recognized as an intelligence, which Schelling contends that nature cannot be in itself. In other words, even if nature is purposiveness, it remains blind and mechanistic. Thus a purposive nature cannot make the move to the synthetic identity by itself. The move to absolute synthetic identity requires an intelligence that can only take place in a self that is an identity of the conscious and the nonconscious and that possesses the »consciousness of this identity.«⁶⁷ This synthetic identity only takes place on the level of the aesthetic.

Schelling is following Kant's insights on this issue. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant revealed that the possibility of teleology depended upon the aesthetic judgment, and that subjective purposiveness made possible objective purposiveness. In the *System*, Schelling has to show that the lower evolves into the higher, or how teleology evolves into the aesthetic. The aesthetic realm reveals the consciousness of the identity of the conscious and the nonconscious, which arises in terms of genius and the generation of its product, viz., art.

What occurs on the level of genius, or in the production of art, is a synthesis of freedom and necessity. The self, or genius, is conscious of his/her production and yet must produce. There is no plan for the production, i. e., it is a free act, and yet the genius cannot explain from whence the product comes. Hence, genius realizes through its free action what he/she can neither will nor know. This act of genius is called inspiration, which Schelling describes as »absolute contingency in the highest power of self-intuition.«⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *System*, 203.

⁶⁶ *System*, 210.

⁶⁷ *System*, 219.

⁶⁸ *System*, 236.

Moreover, a point arises where the production of the work of art »must absolutely stop,« and when the production ceases, the art object is released.⁶⁹ What is produced out of the act of inspiration gives rise to the end of striving and to a »feeling of infinite harmony.«⁷⁰ This endpoint is the point of indifference, and the work of art synthesizes nature and freedom in what Schelling calls an »unconscious infinity,« a sense that the finite artwork has within it »an infinity of purposes« that can never be exhausted. When we stand to the artwork, we are never sure if the infinity of purposes belong to the artist or to the artwork.⁷¹ This sense of unconscious infinity Schelling calls aesthetic intuition, which is only »intellectual intuition become objective.«⁷² The beginning emerges at the end.

The imagination is genius' power and is the productive power par excellence. Through the imagination, all oppositions are overcome. Further, the imagination is in essence both aesthetic and intellectual intuition. By exposing the imagination as the ultimate productive power, Schelling gives new meaning to Kant's view of the imagination as the blind but indispensable power of the soul. At the beginning of the *System*, the self is blind to the fact that the imagination makes the movement possible; at the end of the *System*, the self becomes aware that the imagination has been at work throughout the *System*. However, the point of indifference reveals a mode of darkness that remains impenetrable, in the sense that blindness remains in terms of inspiration.

What Schelling exposes is that the imagination is the power that has been at work throughout the *System*. Without the imagination, the system of transcendental idealism neither begins nor ends, and the final part of the system is not an addendum but an essential component of the system.

One can see in my brief sketch the centrality of the imagination in Schelling's early thought. My sketch provides interesting insights into the relationship between the dialectic and the imagination that could be developed even more in studies of both the *System* and Schelling's later thought. For example, Schelling's later philosophy of the will, particularly as developed in *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschliche Freiheit*, ends with a discussion of inspiration – a discussion distinctly reminiscent of the insight acquired into the imagination in the *System*.

⁶⁹ *System*, 221.

⁷⁰ *System*, 223.

⁷¹ *System*, 225.

⁷² *System*, 229.